

# OUR VISION

## FOR AMERICA'S TREASURED OCEAN PLACES



A FIVE-YEAR STRATEGY FOR THE NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY SYSTEM

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# ABOUT US

We are a network of underwater parks, composed of 13 national marine sanctuaries and two marine national monuments, encompassing more than 600,000 square miles of ocean and Great Lakes waters. We seek to protect the extraordinary scenic beauty, biodiversity, historical connections and economic productivity of these areas so they may continue to serve as the basis for thriving recreation, tourism and commercial activities that drive coastal economies. By acting as responsible stewards of these places, and serving as a hub for domestic and international partnerships and tools, we help ensure a healthier ocean, now and for future generations.





Photo: Matt McIntosh/NOAA



## PLACES

We protect amazing places. Our comprehensive and community-based approach ensures the long-term protection of nationally and internationally significant areas in the ocean and Great Lakes, while supporting sustainable recreation and commercial uses.



## SYSTEM

Our sanctuaries and monuments are part of a larger system of protected areas across the United States and around the world. Together, we connect and strengthen these treasured places for more effective protection.



## PARTNERS

We depend on partners big and small to fulfill our mission, including our nonprofit foundation and more than 470 advisory council members and 10,000 volunteers. In turn, we leverage our small boats, visitor centers and exhibits in support of community interests.

*What we all do together every day makes a real difference for the resources we protect and the communities that rely on them”*

John Armor, Director Office of National Marine Sanctuaries

*From here forward, unless otherwise qualified, the terms “sanctuary” and “sanctuaries” are used to collectively refer to or include all national marine sanctuaries and marine national monuments managed by the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries.*

# ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

On behalf of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, thank you for taking the time to read *Our Vision for America's Treasured Ocean Places: A Five-Year Strategy for the National Marine Sanctuary System*. As the title suggests, this document is designed to set a five-year course for managing some of our nation's most amazing ocean and Great Lakes places. Charged with caring for more than 600,000 square miles, we have multiple responsibilities, finite resources, and increasing needs. And we are growing; as communities around the country recommend new areas for protection, we are responding. With that in mind, we built this document to address [four principal needs](#):

## PRIORITIES

To convey to the American public our priorities over the next five years;

## STAFF

To enhance focus and inspire our staff;

## VALUES

To affirm our core values as an organization; and

## STEWARDSHIP

To deliver on NOAA's responsibilities as stewards of nationally significant ocean places.



To meet these needs, our document has a few key components. We begin with our Mission and Vision, both of which reflect the statutory and executive authorities that guide our work. Next, we express our Core Values, not only to illustrate the attributes and qualities of who we are as an organization, but to define the philosophy behind how we work. At the heart of the document are our five overarching goals which, along with

objectives and priorities, outline the specific actions we will take through 2022.

Drafting this plan allowed us to reflect and focus on what is most important at this key moment in our history. It is the result of input from many of our staff members and partners. Although not designed to capture everything we do, we plan to use this document to: keep ourselves organized, effective, and efficient; concentrate our people and

resources on empowering communities to protect these important areas; improve our collaboration within NOAA and expand our partnerships with other government and non-governmental partners; more effectively bring ocean issues to the public; plot our course for our 50th anniversary in 2022; and make our office a more diverse and inclusive place to work.

**WE INVITE YOU TO  
WORK WITH US.**



Photo: EdLyman/NOAA Permit 774-1714

*This document is intended to guide our team in making decisions, but is not an exhaustive list of everything we do. Actions identified in planning documents within our system, such as management plans, should be prioritized by the goals and objectives, with particular attention given to the specific priorities.*

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# MISSION

WE PROTECT TREASURED  
PLACES IN THE  
**OCEAN**  
AND GREAT  
**LAKES**

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# VISION

A THRIVING SANCTUARY  
SYSTEM THAT PROTECTS OUR  
NATION'S UNDERWATER  
**TREASURES**  
AND INSPIRES MOMENTUM FOR  
A HEALTHY OCEAN

# OUR CORE VALUES



## COMMUNITY

We are dedicated to the communities in which we live and work. We connect with others who feel strongly about the future of our natural, cultural and historic treasures because together we keep these areas thriving.



## CONSERVATION

We come from different places and backgrounds, but all of us are drawn to the ocean and Great Lakes. We are committed to leaving these places better than we found them because they are critical to communities and to a healthy planet.



## COLLABORATION

We join with a diverse and broad coalition of partners to pursue shared interests. Sanctuaries bring people together and build healthy partnerships.

*“ We are privileged to serve our nation as caretakers of some of the most precious places in our ocean and Great Lakes waters. ”*

Sarah Fangman, Superintendent, Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary



Photo: Bob Talbot



## RESPECT

The communities and places in which we work reflect diverse cultures, values, and ideas. We move forward by acknowledging the past and learning from our different cultural values and experiences.



## ACCOUNTABILITY

We honor our commitment to the American public as stewards of their underwater treasures. We deliver results, practice transparency, and strive to exceed expectations.



## CREATIVITY

New ideas and insights are essential to our success. We encourage innovation and flexibility to meet the unique needs of the sanctuary system.



## TEAMWORK

Our success depends on the contributions from everyone on our team. We embrace our diversity of cultures, passions and talents, and foster a culture of trust, continuous learning, and professional development.

# GOAL ONE

## ENSURE THRIVING SANCTUARIES AND OTHER OCEAN PARKS.

Effective management is essential to protecting marine ecosystems, cultural resources, and the benefits each provide to this and future generations.



## **OBJECTIVE 1.1: Reduce threats to key species and marine habitats.**

### **PRIORITIES**

- Complete the rezoning process for Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.
- Mitigate noise impacts to acoustically sensitive species and habitats.
- Carry out vessel strike reduction strategies with the shipping industry and other key partners for west coast sanctuaries.
- Enhance the capacity of other countries to protect sanctuary resources by implementing existing and new sister sanctuary agreements.

## **OBJECTIVE 1.2: Protect significant maritime heritage resources.**

### **PRIORITIES**

- Install mooring buoys at known shipwreck sites in Thunder Bay and the proposed Wisconsin – Lake Michigan (if designated) national marine sanctuaries to eliminate damage from anchors.
- Install trail guidance and mooring buoys at shipwreck sites and along paddling routes at the proposed Mallows Bay – Potomac River, Maryland National Marine Sanctuary (if designated).
- Engage traditional and cultural leaders to develop joint guidelines for the protection of traditional and cultural resources, properties, and practices within tribes and indigenous communities.

## **OBJECTIVE 1.3: Promote responsible human uses.**

### **PRIORITIES**

- Increase the number of enforcement officers at sanctuaries, working with NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement.
- Expand certification programs for boating, charter fishing, and commercial snorkel and dive operations to four additional sanctuaries.
- Develop a comprehensive public engagement program to reduce wildlife disturbance at all sanctuaries.

## **OBJECTIVE 1.4: Promote resilience and adaptation.**

### **PRIORITIES**

- Complete assessments of resources at risk to a changing climate for each sanctuary.
- Establish Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary as a sentinel site that brings together science, management and technologies to monitor and raise awareness about ocean acidification.
- Ensure messaging on changing ocean conditions is incorporated in public education programs.
- Increase our energy efficiency through the installation of new technologies at two or more sites.

# GOAL TWO

## SAFEGUARD MORE UNDERWATER TREASURES AS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES.

Nationally and internationally significant areas in our ocean and Great Lakes need comprehensive and coordinated protection.



## **OBJECTIVE 2.1:** Incorporate additional nationally significant resources into existing sanctuaries.

### **PRIORITIES**

- Complete the process to expand Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary to include additional reefs and bottom features.
- Complete the process to expand Monitor National Marine Sanctuary to include additional historic shipwrecks.
- Incorporate consideration of sanctuary designation for Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument into the interagency management plan development.
- Assess additional expansion scenarios through management plan review processes.

## **OBJECTIVE 2.2:** Implement designation processes for new areas.

### **PRIORITIES**

- Complete the designation process for the proposed national marine sanctuary at Mollusks Bay – Potomac River, Maryland.
- Complete the designation process for the proposed national marine sanctuary at Wisconsin – Lake Michigan.
- Coordinate with leadership on the initiation of the designation process for additional sites on the sanctuary nomination inventory.

## **OBJECTIVE 2.3:** Identify additional resources of national significance.

### **PRIORITIES**

- Engage with communities and other stakeholders regarding approaches to identify nationally significant resources.
- Synthesize existing information on nationally significant resources into accessible products for communities and decision makers.

“*These places represent the innovation, tenacity and entrepreneurial spirit of generations of Americans.*”

Russ Green, Assistant Superintendent, Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary

# GOAL THREE

## INCREASE SUPPORT FOR SANCTUARIES.

Public support is key to effective protection, sustainable use, and enjoyment of sanctuaries.



## OBJECTIVE 3.1: Expand recognition of national marine sanctuaries.

### PRIORITIES

- Assess *Earth Is Blue* campaign and web/social media outreach initiatives and expand to an increasingly diversified audience.
- Expand our initiatives with zoos, aquariums and other partner facilities to educate more people about sanctuaries.
- Collaborate with partners to establish a visitor center or public facility in the expansion areas for Cordell Bank, Greater Farallones, and Thunder Bay national marine sanctuaries.
- Support the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation's efforts to increase external investments in sanctuaries.

## OBJECTIVE 3.2: Increase sanctuary engagement.

### PRIORITIES

- Increase public participation in Get into Your Sanctuary initiatives.
- Grow our volunteer programs for Florida Keys, Flower Garden Banks, and Greater Farallones national marine sanctuaries.
- Create new and align existing citizen science programs to meet the science needs and resource protection issues of sanctuaries.
- Develop a virtual classroom that increases the accessibility of science-based learning for sanctuary communities.
- Further engage with recreational fishermen, in conjunction with NOAA Fisheries, to expand sustainable recreational activities in sanctuaries.

## OBJECTIVE 3.3: Create a vision for the next 50 years of sanctuaries.

### PRIORITIES

- Implement key findings from the Blue Century Summit, a future meeting of ocean experts, to further future protection of our nation's underwater treasures.
- Support the production of a film celebrating the first 50 years of sanctuaries and projecting our vision for the future.

“ Investing in national marine sanctuaries is essential to engage the public in ocean conservation and promote their participation to protect these treasures.”

Julie Bursek, Education and Outreach Team Lead, Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary

# GOAL FOUR

## DEEPEN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF SANCTUARIES.

Sound science is critical to improving the conservation, management, and sustainable use of marine resources and inspiring ocean stewardship.



## OBJECTIVE 4.1: Learn more about our sanctuaries.

### PRIORITIES

- Expand partnerships to characterize deep-sea coral and seamount habitats in sanctuaries.
- Expand use of unmanned technologies to better understand impacts from vessel activity, visitor use, and to characterize animal behavior.
- Update or replace sanctuary boats, for example Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary's Research Vessel *Tatoosh*, to ensure capacity to study sanctuary resources.
- Implement a maritime cultural landscape approach to studies for American Samoa, Florida Keys, Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale, Monterey Bay, and Olympic Coast national marine sanctuaries.
- Expand our efforts to encourage other NOAA offices to conduct research in sanctuaries.

## OBJECTIVE 4.2: Track and predict conditions and trends.

### PRIORITIES

- Identify and track ecosystem services provided by sanctuaries and their resources.
- Develop condition reports documenting status and trends of natural and cultural resources in conjunction with management plan review processes.
- Develop and implement a plan for the control of lionfish, an invasive species in Florida Keys, Flower Garden Banks, and Gray's Reef national marine sanctuaries.

## OBJECTIVE 4.3: Understand the value of sanctuaries to our nation.

### PRIORITIES

- Complete assessments of the type, distribution, and intensity of uses in Gray's Reef and Florida Keys and the proposed Mallows Bay - Potomac River, Maryland and Wisconsin - Lake Michigan sanctuaries.
- Conduct valuation studies to characterize the impact of our education and citizen science programs.
- Assess, document and communicate the value of the sanctuary to whale watch operators in Channel Islands and fishing operators in Florida Keys.

“ We marvel at nature’s pulse and power. Its wounds are ours too. We dress them with science, confident that we have a say in its fate. ”

Steve Gittings, Chief Scientist, Office of National Marine Sanctuaries

# GOAL FIVE

## ENSURE THE OFFICE OF NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES IS A GREAT PLACE TO WORK.

Our people are our most important asset. Their competence, commitment, diversity, and creativity are vital to achieving NOAA's mission and our nation's interests.



## OBJECTIVE 5.1: Encourage a culture of collaboration, inclusion, and respect.

### PRIORITIES

- Create opportunities for staff growth and collaboration through short-term assignments and team-building activities.
- Enlist diverse and talented professionals through fellowships, internships, and volunteer opportunities.
- Empower our diversity and inclusion committee to provide leadership strategies for sustaining positive change that promotes a safe, welcoming, and professionally challenging work environment.

## OBJECTIVE 5.2: Increase staff satisfaction and performance.

### PRIORITIES

- Ensure supervisors promote a positive work-life balance.
- Create opportunities for staff to provide feedback to leadership and supervisors.

## OBJECTIVE 5.3: Invest in our people and their professional development.

### PRIORITIES

- Encourage employees and supervisors to assess and prioritize employee training and develop individual development plans.
- Establish an orientation for new staff, including information on employment, performance management, time and attendance, and travel.
- Develop a Core Policies and Procedures Handbook and ongoing training for best business practices and performance.
- Support leadership and management training for supervisors and team leads.
- Encourage and facilitate formal and informal mentoring opportunities.

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*Sanctuaries aren't just places; they're communities. By investing in people and diversity, we invest in the future of our ocean and Great Lakes.”*

— Liz Weinberg, Social Media Coordinator, Office of National Marine Sanctuaries/National Marine Sanctuary Foundation

## ■ MAKING IT HAPPEN

A strategic plan is of little use to an organization without a means of putting it into action. The ideas, initiatives and priorities in this plan are only words on paper until we collectively integrate them into our day-to-day activities throughout NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries.

*We are committed to having our team and our partners recognize the goals set out in this plan and, more importantly, their role in helping to achieve them. We intend to track results, not actions, ensuring our key priorities are having the desired impact. We look forward to working with all of you to make this happen.*



## TO DO SO, WE WILL:

- Create an environment that ensures our staff and partners are active participants in achieving our mission, objectives, and priorities.
- Prioritize the actions identified in existing planning documents that align with this strategy.
- Align revisions to management plans and employee performance plans with the intent of this strategy.
- Use this strategy to guide future decisions, including resource allocation and staffing prioritization.





NATIONAL MARINE  
SANCTUARIES